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THE MENACE OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED IN MASSACHUSETTS

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THE NEED OF A
PROGRAM

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The Menace of the Feeble-Minded



The tragic story of the Corwin family.

Ten thousand feeble-minded a conservative estimate of the number at large in the State.

Only nineteen hundred feeble-minded under care in the two institutions in Massachusetts.

Eight hundred and eighty-six waiting to be admitted on April 1st.

\$64,775 the cost to the State of three families with twenty children, or about \$3,240 per person.

What has happened in Massachusetts because such cases as the above are left at large

May, 1913

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COMMITTEE ON PROTECTION OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED

of the

MASSACHUSETTS SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO CHILDREN

43 MT. VERNON STREET, BOSTON, MASS.



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I. ONE OF MANY

Feeble-mindedness, physical deformity, sensuality, corruption of the youth, adultery, illegitimacy, and manslaughter! What a train of crime the Corwin* family reveals.

The father is stupid and simple, though not a bad man. The mother was recently committed to the Women's Reformatory at Sherborn after a long record of adulterous conduct, which she carried on with white and black alike, before husband, children, and grandchildren, without any feeling of shame.

Eleven children were born to this couple, but Thomas is the only one who is known to be self-supporting and respectable. The whereabouts of three others are unknown. Gilbert, a son of twenty-five, was recently held for the grand jury on the charge of manslaughter, but he was so clearly defective that it would have been a second crime to have punished him for what he had done, but the bearing of which he could not comprehend. Instead, he was certified as a mental defective and admitted to the Institution for the Feeble-minded at Waverley.

Cora, a daughter of twenty-seven, is married to a worthless, deformed, sensual creature, who has not hesitated to enter into immoral relations with his wife's mother. Cora herself has two illegitimate children, one born before marriage and the other since. But these women are not the ordinary prostitutes, for they take particular delight in seeking out and corrupting the young men and boys of their communities who are just reaching maturity, and each acts as a decoy for the other, and when a sister of ten was being assaulted in their own house, Cora did not hesitate to look on from another room. Cora has also been certified to be a defective, but when a place was sought where this source of moral contagion could be segregated, no room could be found for her.

*The names used in this pamphlet are all fictitious.

Edith, another daughter of thirty, is a repulsive, misshapen idiot.

The remaining four children, together with two grandchildren, most of whom are too young as yet to determine the grade of their mentality, have been removed from their filthy and immoral home and committed to the State Board of Charity, to be brought up at public expense for better things, if only their heritage allows this to become possible.

II. ESTIMATED NUMBER OF FEEBLE-MINDED IN MASSACHUSETTS

Conditions in the Corwin family just described are not unique or exaggerated. They are typical of a large number of the feeble-minded in Massachusetts who are not now under institutional care, though the number of such persons living in our various communities is extremely difficult to determine.

In 1912 the State Board of Insanity made a census by means of correspondence with overseers, hospital authorities, superintendents of schools, social workers, and any others who might know of any number of feeble-minded. By this means 5,007 different cases were reported. Later on, to test the accuracy of these reports, a house to house canvass of twenty-one towns in Worcester County was made. This revealed nearly three (2.8) times as many cases in these towns as had been reported under the previous correspondence method. These returns gave a rate for these towns of one feeble-minded person to five hundred and six of the population, or about two per thousand, a rate that had previously been given as the minimum in the report of the Commission to Study the Increase of Criminals, Mental Defectives, Epileptics, and Degenerates.

However, if the same proportion of under-statement in the census by correspondence exists throughout the State, then 14,000 rather than 5,000 is more nearly the correct number. The true figure is between 5,000 and 14,000 persons, and probably about 10,000. This number

does not include any of the 1900 feeble-minded persons receiving care in the two schools for the feeble-minded, in 1913.

III. OUR PRESENT SITUATION IN MASSACHUSETTS

The development of accommodations for the institutional care of the feeble-minded in Massachusetts has been at least on a par with that in other States, but like other States we have as yet only imperfectly awakened to the menace that the feeble-minded have become to the welfare of our communities.

About 1,500 are at present in the care of the Massachusetts School for the Feeble-Minded at Waverley and about 400 in the Wrentham State School at Wrentham, a total of about 1,900 under care. In addition, there are about 600 in the various almshouses of the State. The last group, however, do not get training when they are teachable, nor do they get the close oversight which their condition requires.

A growing public sentiment requires that feeble-minded women of child-bearing age who are a burden to the community and a menace to the future wellbeing of the race, and defectives with criminal tendencies shall be segregated; that idiots shall have custodial care; and that feeble-minded children shall have the training and education that their mental capacities permit them to enjoy. These requirements represent a change in public sentiment which, together with a broader interpretation of what constitutes feeble-mindedness and a better appreciation of the excellent care that these unfortunates are receiving in modern institutions, is responsible for the increase in the number of applications for admissions to the schools of this class.

Unfortunately, however, the number to be admitted is very quickly limited by the bed capacity of these schools, and has shown a constant tendency to outrun the space available. The following table shows the growth in the number of applications for admission, the number admitted, the number of inmates, and the bed capacity for various recent years:

Year	Applications for admission	Number of per- sons admitted	Inmates	Beds
1895	164	47	426	421
1900	280	114	626	600
1905	370	282	934	1,092
1910	594	464	1,642	1,650
1912	787	366	1,855	1,841

The notable increase in the number of inmates from 900 to 1,600, namely, over seventy-five per cent, between 1905 and 1910, marks this as the period during which the rapid growth of institutional care began. This great increase in the number under care in 1910 and the large number admitted in that year was largely due to the opening of the new school at Wrentham. Throughout the table it is evident that the number of inmates is constantly as large or larger than the bed capacity, and in the report of the school at Waverley for 1912, page 17, it is stated: "We have been much overcrowded during the entire year. At one time there were sixty patients sleeping on mattresses on the floor, on settees, and even on tables and chairs."

The significance of the figures in this table then will lie mainly in comparing the number of persons admitted with the number of persons applying for admission. In spite of the opening of the new school at Wrentham and the overcrowding both there and at Waverley, the table shows conclusively that the schools are not only not able to keep abreast of the demand, but are steadily losing ground. Starting in 1905, when the number admitted reached almost 300, a larger and larger number of persons have been refused admission each year. For example, in 1905 there were only 98 applications by persons who could not be admitted; in 1910 the difference had become 130 in spite of the opening of the second school; while in 1912 there were 421 applications from persons who could not be admitted for lack of room, which was 55 more than were actually admitted during the same year.

Nor does this tell the whole story. There is a wide-

spread feeling of the uselessness of forwarding more applications. Court officers, physicians, overseers of the poor, social workers, and others have been discouraged, and no longer apply for more admissions while so many previous applications are still on file. Because of the lack of room the superintendents themselves have openly discouraged needy cases from being applied for; notwithstanding, during April, 1913, 886 cases, still considered pressing as far as the superintendents knew, were awaiting admission. Physicians in all parts of the State examine new cases constantly, certify them as feeble-minded, the court "commits" them, and then because of lack of room nothing is done.



IV. THE COST OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED OUTSIDE OF INSTITUTIONS

Wherever a careful study has been made, feeble-mindedness is found to constitute a serious drain upon the resources of all public and private agencies for relief. Resources which should be used for the relief of normal

persons are diverted to the needs of defectives, with the result that conditions which should be made impossible are perpetuated.

✓ All who have studied or have had to do with the feeble-minded are convinced that they inevitably become the dependent, delinquent, or diseased members of their communities, and producing offspring, these are equally ignorant, immoral, and prolific. In one way or another the burden of their support is thrown upon private or more commonly upon public charity.

✓ It is impossible to express adequately the cumulative burden, but the following instances may help to make the financial cost clear.

The probable cost to the State of Massachusetts of twenty children in three defective families has recently been calculated to be \$64,775. These figures are based upon the annual cost of maintenance of \$125 for every child committed to the State Board of Charity, and of \$180 for every one committed to the institutions for the feeble-minded. In the case of the former the age of twenty-one, or time of discharge in the cases where it had already happened, was made the limit, while in the case of the feeble-minded the expense was calculated up to the age of thirty-three, which it may be assumed is a conservative expectation of life. This gives an average of about \$3,240 for each child.

In "The Hill Folk," a Report on a Rural Community of Hereditary Defectives, recently issued by Florence H. Danielson and Charles B. Davenport, a chapter is devoted to the financial burden entailed by criminals and dependents of these family groups, living in a town of Massachusetts. To compare the amount of poor relief given to this family, the amounts paid in two decades were studied, with the following result:

Decade	Total aid to Paupers	Aid to The Hill Families	Per cent of total to The Hill Families
1879-89 excluding 1888	\$15,964	\$1,483	9.3%
1901-10	27,045	7,873	29.1%

This increase of poor relief of four hundred and thirty per cent in three decades illustrates graphically the growth of the burden. But this financial cost is but a small part, for turning to the court and prison records for the last thirty years, we find that at least sixteen persons from The Hill Families have been sentenced to prison for serious crimes during that time. The cost of these sixteen persons to the county and State through their courts and institutions has been at least \$10,763.43. The crimes committed included lewdness, rape, incest, adultery, assault, burglary, etc. About one third of the business of the court came from these families.

The third and largest item of expense was for the maintenance of the wards of the State. Thirty-five different members of these families have been State charges, and for cost of commitment, board, clothing, school tuition, officers, salaries, etc., they have cost by careful computation as accurately as can be estimated, \$45,888.57. But of these thirty-five, twenty-one are still under care, and their cost for the future has not been included. To quote from the report: "The financial burden, then, which The Hill people entail is constantly increasing, and that far beyond the proportion of their increase in numbers. This burden rests especially upon the town in which they live. The four hundred per cent increase in the financial aid which they have required in the last decade presents this fact in a startling manner. The large percentage of the crimes which were against sex indicate that the influence which such persons exert in a community is of far more importance than the 10,700 odd dollars spent in punishing the criminals after the influence has been established. The money expended on the State wards is well spent where even half of them are trained for useful citizenship, but the imposition upon society of an equal number of undesirable citizens calls for a policy of prevention which will work hand in hand with the present one of partial alleviation."

V. THE ALTERNATIVES, AND WHAT WE CAN DO THIS YEAR

There are two important projects before the General Court of 1913 by means of which help can be obtained in making more suitable provision for these unfortunates and in protecting our communities from crime, degradation, and misery, and from an increasing financial burden without any relief in sight.

Under Chapter 495 of the Acts of 1911 the delinquents in our various penal institutions who are certified as defectives may be transferred to a department where they may have continuous care suitable to their condition, so that they may not drift out again into the community and helplessly commit new offenses. To this group may be added those inmates of our institutions for the feeble-minded that are certified as having criminal inclinations, as well as those who in our communities show these same criminal tendencies and are a menace to community life.

The Prison Commission of Massachusetts, who are charged with the care of these unfortunates, after careful study this year ask for an appropriation of \$100,000 to build a new department for women and girls at Sherborn, and an additional \$100,000 to build a similar department at the State Farm for men over twenty-one.

The Institution for the Feeble-Minded at Waverley is not only overcrowded, but it is administratively a completed unit and cannot very well have its bed capacity added to. The State School at Wrentham is now building two additional cottages to accommodate 210. This year the Trustees are asking for an additional appropriation of about \$295,000 to provide for 345 more of these unfortunates.

Feeble-mindedness is eighty per cent hereditary. By segregation only can sufficient relief be obtained so that these unfortunates will not propagate their kind. Both of these appropriations should therefore be passed, for they may be looked upon as a sound financial investment for the future wellbeing of our State.

The State Board of Insanity should be asked to deter-

mine the approximate increase of this group of unfortunates, and then if the State would place under care each year an additional number, somewhat in excess of this increase, the feeble-minded would in a generation largely disappear.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts faces two alternatives. Shall it continue forever to pay the constantly increasing cost that the feeble-minded and their unfortunate descendants are laying upon us through courts, prisons, county jails, almshouses, hospitals, probation service, care of children through the State Board of Charity and overseers of the poor, — to which must be added the burden that they lay upon infant and orphan asylums, associated charities, relief societies, and child-helping agencies; or, shall we adopt the other alternative and face courageously this problem with a remedy which lies at hand? Segregation is humane and effective, and a good financial investment for developing greater prosperity and happiness in the future.

VI. VARIOUS TYPES OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED AND EXAMPLES OF EACH

The results of feeble-mindedness manifest themselves in many ways in our communities, and for convenience of illustration five groups have been made. Many of the illustrations given might, however, with equal justice have been placed in one or another of these classes or in several of them at the same time. All of these are on the waiting lists of the two institutions and the relatives are eager to have them protected. Space alone is lacking. There are many hundreds more of each class in Massachusetts.

(a) *Young Women with Illegitimate Children*

This type of case is well known to all public and private charities. These young women are many times attractive in appearance and demeanor, and fall easy prey to designing men. When relieved of the care of infants whom they do not know how to bring up, they often drift into prostitution.

1. Bessie's mother came of a group who are notorious for stupidity, feeble-mindedness, and intermarriage. Bessie went to school, but could learn almost nothing. While still a mere child she married a youth who had gotten her pregnant. After he died she became pregnant again by her uncle, in spite of her father's and sister's watchfulness. The letter from the father making application for her commitment states, "She has no capacity except for scandal and gossip, and this is made use of by the lower element. . . . I am getting old and cannot keep up the fight," i.e., to keep his daughter out of trouble. Her name is still on the waiting list for admission.

2. The mother of the Grand family married at seventeen, gave birth to at least eleven children, and died at forty of tuberculosis. Five of these children have died. Four of the survivors are feeble-minded women. One of them has given birth to a second illegitimate child and is now in the almshouse. The three other feeble-minded are equally indolent and cannot read or write, though two are at work in a candy factory at simple tasks. All are passionate, and the father is anxious to have them safeguarded, but so far in vain.

3. Sarah is a stupid Jewish girl of eighteen who is undoubtedly feeble-minded. Her mother is dead. Her home is poor. She herself is undersized and in poor health. She is untruthful and dishonest in money matters, and only capable of the simplest tasks. She is now pregnant and in Boston awaiting her confinement.

4. Wilma is an illiterate woman of twenty-five, whose mind when tested was shown to be that of a child of seven. She comes from a family which includes a long line of thieves, prostitutes, and other degenerates of white and negro blood. The girl is undersized and has an impediment in her speech. She has had one illegitimate child, and is not safe on the street unattended. Her sister, who was also feeble-minded, died as a prostitute. Her feeble-minded brother has had three children born to him in his mother's house of prostitution that are now in the care of the State Board of Charity. Another feeble-minded brother has married a low-grade imbecile, to whom a child has just been born.

5. Lillian was the nineteen-year-old girl of a most unfortunate and unhappy union. Her mother proved to be defective and immoral, and used Lillian as a decoy for finding vicious

men for her own practices. This inevitably led the girl astray, and while at the State Infirmary to give birth to an illegitimate child, she was pronounced feeble-minded and diseased.

6. Susie is an American girl of fifteen. Her father is now dead, but while living never amounted to anything. Her mother is a simple-minded woman. The girl is a low-grade mental defective, and is now pregnant by her brother, who has run away. She does not understand the significance of her condition and is clearly not responsible for it. Two years ago she could not be admitted to an institution for the feeble-minded because of the waiting list, and now when she is to enter it she leaves behind a defective baby for the community to care for.

7. Dora is a defective, unmarried mother of twenty-four, with an illegitimate child. She is very emotional and sensual. Ever since she was a little girl she has submitted to or invited sex relations with boys and men. In several families where she has worked as a servant she has enticed the men of the families by going into their rooms late at night or waiting for them as they passed through the halls, for she says the presence of men excites her beyond control. She has probably been pregnant before and committed abortions. She passes over her affairs as of no account. If allowed to live in the community she will certainly be the mother of more children, and by reason of her immoral actions will spread venereal disease far and wide.

8. Louise, a woman of twenty, belongs to a defective group of children of an alcoholic father and a high-grade feeble-minded mother, who was herself an illegitimate child. The superintendent of the almshouse, in which she and her illegitimate child have been for some time, pronounces her sexually uncontrollable and a great menace, for in spite of constant supervision she has threatened the life of her child. None the less, specialists so far have deemed her uncommittable.

Pearl, an eighteen year old sister, is clearly feeble-minded, but because of the waiting list she has had to remain at home, where she was cruel and abusive to the younger children, and was constantly subject to temptation from a Chinese laundryman and a criminal Italian living on either side of her. At length she was transferred to the almshouse.

One son has been committed to an insane hospital; a second to the Parental School, though really mentally defective; a third, also defective, has become a ward of the State, while a fourth has been admitted to the Wrentham State School.

(b) *Irresponsible and Neglectful Parents*

The offspring of the feeble-minded, even when not defective, receive such cruel treatment, poor care and training that they become the neglected and wayward children of our communities. The last family is a case in point. The father was alcoholic, the mother feeble-minded. Of the seven children the one who was normal lacked the bringing up that would in any way equip him for life in his community.

9. Torney is a man of sixty who together with his wife are both high-grade imbeciles of decadent New England stock. The father is improvident and revengeful. The mother is irritable, suspicious, and childish. Both have violent tempers. A son of thirty-five does foolish if not criminal pranks. He and his mother have both been suspected of incendiarism. He has served several terms in prison and his whereabouts are now unknown. A daughter of twenty-five is a low-grade imbecile, a vagrant, unchaste, diseased creature. She has married an imbecile. There is a son of fifteen who is much like his father.

10. Williams, who seems feeble-minded but has not been examined, married as his second wife a woman who is also probably feeble-minded. She has borne him eleven children. Four of these have been pronounced feeble-minded and are now in the Waverley institution. Two more of them have been taken by the State Board of Charity, and are suspected of feeble-mindedness. The whereabouts of the rest are unknown. The home conditions in which these people lived were of the very worst. The children lived like animals and were covered with both head and body vermin.

11. The father of the O'Neil family is intemperate, stutters, and is a high-grade imbecile. The mother has an impediment in her speech and is also an imbecile. Of the six children, one is suspected of being feeble-minded and five are considered feeble-minded. Of the last group, Joseph, a boy of ten, is a low-grade idiot. He has never attended school. Henry and Harold, twins of five, have no teeth, are undersized, of the microcephalic idiot type, their health is poor and their speech imperfect. Minnie, a girl of nine, is incapable of profiting by the school instruction which the teachers are trying to give her. Her speech is defective and she is also microcephalic.

12. Mary Cotter is a married woman of twenty-five who comes from a degenerate family. Her husband, who is just out of jail, is cruel and abusive, lazy, drunken, ugly, and apt to steal most of his living. He has been arrested once for shooting a man. At one time he threw this wife and her four days' old baby out of doors. The first wife, who was half-witted, died in a barn during childbirth. The overseers of the poor write that he "always has some woman to abuse." The home is filthy and ramshackle; there is insufficient food. A man and woman who were unmarried have been living in the home with them. The applicant is almost stone deaf and talks with difficulty. She has been pronounced feeble-minded and been committed by the court, but she is still at large and her husband is trying to find her. Two of the children are in the care of the State Board of Charity.

(c) *Defective Delinquents*

It is estimated that from twenty-five to thirty per cent of the juvenile and adult inmates of our prisons and reformatories are of this type. Our feeble-minded institutions contain a considerable number of the same group who, when discharged into the community, become lawbreakers and again and again come before the courts for commitment.

13. Edith is a feeble-minded girl of eighteen, whose mother is dead and who boards with her father, now here, now there, for they are forced to move frequently because of the girl's abnormalities. She is nervous, excitable, and quick tempered; she steals, sets fires, and breaks windows. Besides, she is disgustingly filthy in her habits and does not hesitate to falsely accuse men of having immoral relations with her. Over a year ago she was pronounced feeble-minded, and her father has asked that she may be protected. In the doctor's letter accompanying the application he writes, "I hope you can accept her at once, as she is a menace to the community."

14. Jacob, who is now seventeen, was born of a feeble-minded mother. The home was dirty and disorderly in the extreme. There is grave doubt whether she was ever married, and her morality is at present questioned. The boy was in special and ungraded classes most of his school life. He displayed a vicious influence over the rest of the children. He

has recently been committed to Concord Reformatory for larceny and gross immorality. His admission to Waverley some years ago would have been a blessing not only to him but to others who have suffered at his hands.

15. Three children were born to the Easton family, two of whom were blind idiots, but they have died. The third son has recently been suspected of taking a purse from a woman's pocket, and he admits that he has done this at several other times. He is queer and troublesome at home, so that his mother has felt that something was wrong with his head. For instance, he will leave the house without clothing on, and when questioned will say, "I can't help it." The physician who has examined him feels that the only safeguard in his case is custodial care which he cannot at present receive.

16. Samuel is a deaf and dumb Jewish boy of seventeen who has a bad reputation with the police in his vicinity. He has been twice arrested, once for breaking and entering and once for having robbed a drunken woman. He is able to talk but little, but what he says is of a vulgar and profane character. His father has little sympathy with him and calls him "the dummy."

(d) Idiots Requiring Institutional Care

This group is perhaps less a menace in the community than a burden in the particular families into which they have been born.

17. The Gardin family have four children surviving out of eleven. Two of these, a grown man and a woman, are feeble-minded. Both are totally blind and growing deaf. Their education at the School for the Blind has been attempted, but without success. The young man later tried to undertake some simple industrial tasks in which many of the blind succeed, but he was not able to do even the simplest unaided. The young woman still plays with the toys that will amuse a small child.

18. Ann Simpson is a woman of forty-five with the mind of a child of twelve. This woman's mother, who is undoubtedly feeble-minded, has been immoral and has been at Deer Island a good many times; a record of marriage cannot be found. Ann was complained of by neighbors years ago because she

led young girls astray. An application was made for her admission to an institution for the feeble-minded, but there was no room. She has since had a venereal disease and has served two years at Sherborn Reformatory for night-walking, and is now a common prostitute whose whereabouts are unknown.

19. Thompson is a man of forty-five, of a quiet temperament, with no bad habits, who becomes violent and destructive when he is abused or teased. He can neither read nor count, but he needs shelter, understanding, and sympathy. In the crowded condition of our institutions he is naturally among the last to be admitted.

20. Frances Smith is a girl of about twenty, an only daughter, but an imbecile of the lowest grade, who has never made the slightest progress in school. She has just given birth to an illegitimate child, but she is so stupid that even during her confinement she could not be made to understand what had happened and that the child was hers. The man who is thought to be the father of the child is also of low mentality and unable even to support himself. The mother is anxious that her daughter shall now be admitted to the school, and she is on the waiting list, but there is at present no room.

21. Rose is a feeble-minded woman of twenty-three. She is crippled, scarcely talks, her left side is paralyzed, and she is subject to convulsions. She is both untidy and destructive, and her constant need of care and supervision is a great drag on the household.

(e) *Feeble-Minded Children*

These are of a type that are capable of considerable education and training. Though perhaps never to be trusted out in the community, they can be in a measure self-supporting in an institution.

22. A few months ago Lucia, a little Italian girl of thirteen, when examined by an alienist, because her teacher had complained of her backwardness, was found to be feeble-minded. It was then learned that her maternal grandfather was insane; that a maternal aunt was for two years in an insane hospital in New York, and that her mother had been deported to Italy

because of insanity. The mental condition of the only other children of these parents was tested and another child was pronounced nervous, hysterical, and probably suffering from epilepsy. The father of these girls is cruel to them at home, but there is no place for them to have better protection.

23. Horace is a boy of nine whose name may indicate descent from old New England stock. Upon examination he was pronounced feeble-minded. He has been so troublesome at school that they have had to exclude him. He is unruly, irritable, stubborn, and destructive. A brother was for a time at the Worcester Insane Hospital. Both of his parents are anxious that he might have the training that only a special school can provide.

24. Wilfred is the only son of a mother who was decidedly illiterate and intemperate, but who has now died of tuberculosis, and the boy is largely left without care from early morning until night. Although seventeen years of age he is so backward that he could not do the work of the first grade. An alienist has recently pronounced him feeble-minded. He is weak willed and untruthful, uses low language, and is silly with girls. It is felt, however, that under direction he is capable of doing some industrial work.

25. Hattie, a motherless girl, in the care of one of the children's societies of Boston, has just been certified feeble-minded. The father, a hard drinker, claims that has remarried, but it is believed that he is living illegally with another woman. At any rate he does not care for the girl. Her brothers have repeatedly been truants and one of them is now in Concord Reformatory. The girl is extremely backward and troublesome in school, is unruly, stubborn, and deceitful, and needs special training very much.



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